

THE HISTORICAL USE OF THE RELATIVE PRONOUNS
IN ENGLISH LITERATURE.

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In examining the manuscript of a new volume submitted for publication, I was struck with the fact that the relative pronoun *which* was not used by the author. The question arose, whether there was a portion of our country in which, through historical or possibly educational influence, the use of *that* prevailed in place of *which*. In my subsequent reading, I marked the use of these pronouns in order to determine their literary use. Many of the characteristics of literary form depend upon the choice of the pronoun adopted. The use of one or the other pronoun is a characteristic of the style of representative English writers and lends a special quality to their form and expression.

The Germanic languages did not possess a distinctive relative pronoun. The place of such pronoun in Old English was supplied by *sē*, *sēo* and *paet*, also by the indeclinable demonstrative form *pē* (the), which was frequently added to the article, and, though less frequently, by the interrogatives *which* and *who*. *What* (*hwæt*) as a relative occurs first at the beginning of the thirteenth century. Following the Conquest, the use of *pē* (the) as a relative declined, due, possibly, to the increasing tendency to use this particle in place of all the forms of the definite article. About 1200, the neuter *paet* was, in general, used as a relative in both numbers and in all persons and genders in the nominative and accusative cases. This use may have been promoted by the influence of the French conjunction *que*.

The interrogatives *who* and *which* were used, but only in isolated cases, as relatives, *who* referring mainly to persons and *which* to things. By the time of the translation of the King James version of the Bible, in 1611, the development in the use of the relative pronouns had attained certain distinct features. The most striking differentiation in use consisted in the fact that *that* was made to refer to pronouns and *which* to nouns. The use of *which* had constantly increased and had gradually displaced *that*, and *who* and *what* had gained in frequency of use. The

present tendency in literature is to employ *who* and *which* at the expense of the earlier *that*.

Every scholar will judge from his own use, or from the environment in which his speech has been formed, in respect to the frequency and naturalness of the use of *which* and *that* in his own case. That which we do instinctively is the test of familiar expression. Writers upon the use of language in rhetorics and popular grammars exhibit great diversity of judgment respecting the use of these pronouns. Dean Alford, in his book upon the Queen's English, fourth edition, 1874, in speaking of the use of *who* and *which*, remarks: "Now we do not commonly use either one or the other of these pronouns, but make the more convenient one *that* make duty for both. We do not say 'The man *who* met me, nor the cattle *which* I saw grazing,' but 'The man *that* met me, the cattle *that* I saw grazing.'"

Bain, in his *Higher English Grammar*, says that *who* and *which* are most commonly preferred for co-ordination, but that they may also be used as restrictives. "However, *that* is the proper restrictive, explicative or defining relative. It would be a clear gain to confine *who* and *which* to co-ordination and to reserve *that* for the restrictive use alone. In the sentence 'His conduct surprised his English friends *who* had not known him long,' we mean either that his English friends generally were surprised (the relative being in this case co-ordinating), or that only a portion of them—namely, the particular portion that had not known him long—were surprised. The doubt would be removed by writing thus, 'His English friends *that* had not known him long.' So, also, in the sentence 'The next winter *which* you will spend in town will give you opportunity to make a more prudent choice;' this may either mean you will spend next winter in town or the next of the winters when you are to live in town, let that come when it may. In the former case *which* is the proper relative, and in the latter case *that*." According to my own impression, the ambiguity in the sentence "His English friends *that* had not known him long" would not be removed, as the author thinks, by the substitution of *that* for *which* in this case.

Genung, in *The Working Principles of Rhetoric*, 1902, says: "Typically, the relatives *who* and *which* assume that the antecedent is fully defined in sense, their office being to introduce additional information about it. They may accordingly be called

the additive relative, and are equivalent to a demonstrative with a conjunction, 'and he,' 'and this,' 'and these.' The relative *that* assumes that its antecedent is not yet fully defined, its office being to complete or restrict its meaning. It may accordingly be called the restrictive relative, and may generally be represented, by way of equivalent, by an adjectival or participial phrase."

Professor Hill, of Harvard, says: "Few good authors observe the rule that *who* or *which* should be confined to cases in which the relative clause explains the meaning of the antecedent or adds something to it, and *that* to cases in which the relative clause restricts the meaning of the antecedent. This rule, however helpful to clearness it may be in theory, few good authors observe; considerations of euphony prevent adoption of the rule" (*Principles of Rhetoric*, revised and enlarged, page 136).

Meiklejohn, in his *English Language*, says: "*That* is generally employed to limit, distinguish and define. Thus we say 'The house *that* I built is for sale.' Here, the word *that* is an adjective limiting or defining the noun house. Hence, it may be called the defining relative. *Who* or *which* introduces a new fact about the antecedent; *that* only marks it off from the other nouns."

We thus have here representative opinions from English, Scotch and American scholars, who base their judgment mainly upon their practical experience of language and not upon an examination of the literary monuments in different periods. It is our purpose, therefore, to ascertain the historical use of these pronouns and to determine the frequency with which they occur in representative works in literature, since the period of Wiclif's translation of the Bible.

An examination of the two texts of Layamon's *Brut*, issued about seventy years apart, show how complete the distinction between these pronouns had become in that period. In the older text (of about 1205) the earlier relatives of different genders as well as *þe* are used, while the later manuscript B. (of about 1275) represents these pronouns by a uniform *þæt* (that).

A.

(Line 13,827) An alle mine liue, þe ich, iluued habbe.

B.

In al mine liue, þat ich ileued habbe.

In the century which follows, *who* and *which* occur, but less frequently. In the language of Chaucer (1340-1400), *that* is the

prevailing relative; *who*, *whose* and *whom* occur but in few instances, and may then relate either to persons or things, as in Shakespeare. Chaucer stood more under French influence as regards language than his great contemporary, Wiclif (1324-1384), who in his translation of the Bible was influenced more by Latin constructions. If we examine the *Morte d'Arthur* of Sir Thomas Malory (1400-1470), which lies intermediate in time between Wiclif and Tyndale, we find in 555 lines 30 cases of the use of *that* as a relative, 6 cases of the use of *who* or *whom* in indirect questions, or as an indefinite relative equal to *whoever*, while *which* (*the whiche*) occurs but once in the nominative and once, "*for the whiche*," governed by a preposition. This shows that *that* retained its supremacy in the fifteenth century.

If we now compare the use of the relative pronouns in Wiclif's (1384) and in Tyndale's (1526) translations of the Gospels, which are separated by about a century and a half, we find the following results.

The approximate number of times that the relative pronouns *which*, *that* and *who* occur in the four Gospels in the Wiclif and Tyndale versions is as follows:

In Wiclif's version of the Gospels

<i>which</i> occurs	29	times in	Matthew
	18	" "	Mark
	97	" "	Luke
	27	" "	John
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	171	" "	the four Gospels

In Tyndale's version

<i>which</i> occurs	135	times in	Matthew
	61	" "	Mark
	241	" "	Luke
	125	" "	John
	<hr/>		
	562	" "	the four Gospels

In Wiclif's version

<i>that</i> occurs	205	times in	Matthew
	84	" "	Mark
	284	" "	Luke
	228	" "	John
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	801	" "	the four Gospels

In Tyndale's version

<i>that</i> occurs	120	times	in	Matthew
	78	"	"	Mark
	161	"	"	Luke
	144	"	"	John
	—			
	503	"	"	the four Gospels

In Wiclif's version

<i>who</i> occurs	8	times	in	Matthew
	8	"	"	Mark
	21	"	"	Luke
	25	"	"	John
	—			
	62	"	"	the four Gospels

In Tyndale's version

<i>who</i> occurs	13	times	in	Matthew
	10	"	"	Mark
	21	"	"	Luke
	30	"	"	John
	—			
	74	"	"	the four Gospels

In Wiclif's version

<i>whose</i> occurs	1		in	Matthew
	0		"	Mark
	3	times	"	Luke
	5	"	"	John
	—			
	9	"	"	the four Gospels

In Tyndale's version

<i>whose</i> occurs	0		in	Matthew
	1		"	Mark
	5	times	"	Luke
	5	"	"	John
	—			
	11	"	"	the four Gospels

The relatives *that*, *which* and *who* occur in Wiclif 1043 times, *that* 801 times or in about 76 per cent. of the cases, *which* 171 times or in 16.4 per cent., *who* or *whose* 71 times or in 6.8 per

cent. of all cases. In Tyndale's version we find a change, the same pronouns occur 1150 times; *which* has gained in frequency of use, occurring 562 times or in about 50 per cent. of all cases, *that* 503 times or in 44 per cent., *who* in 85 cases or in about 7.4 per cent.

To summarize: *that* occurs in Wiclif's version in 76 per cent. of all cases, but in the Tyndale version in only 44 per cent. of such cases, while *which*, appearing in but 16.4 per cent. of such cases in Wiclif, has risen to 50 per cent. in Tyndale, and soon becomes the leading relative.

In Tyndale's translation of 1526, a usage was established which was preserved with only limited exceptions in the King James version of 1611. As religion appeals to the strongest convictions of our nature, and is associated with glowing feeling, the fixed forms in which truth is conveyed in the Bible have stamped themselves upon human thought and expression. From the restricted use of *which* in 1200 it had in the fourteenth century, the period of Wiclif and Chaucer, attained a recognized currency, while 150 years later (1526) it divided almost equally the sovereignty with *that*.

The dominant use of *which* with nouns is a fact which we might have anticipated from the primitive meaning of *which*, *hwilic* or *hwalic*, of *what kind*, *how constituted*, like the Latin *qualis*. Substantives naturally possess character or quality, and the relative in referring to them means *of which kind*. *That* merely identifies and does not describe; similarly, *who* indicates usually an individual. Thus in Shakespeare, "I have known those *which* (*qualis*) walked in their sleep, *who* (equal to *and yet they*) died holily in their beds" (*Macbeth*, V, 1, 66). Quoted by Abbott, *Shakespearean Grammar*, page 182.

Which is uniformly employed with proper names: "And thou, Capernaum, *which* art exalted unto heaven" (Matthew 11 : 23); "Then cometh he to a city of Samaria, *which* is called Sychar" (John 4 : 5); "For he was father-in-law to Caiaphas, *which* was the high priest that same year" (John 18 : 13); "The same day came to him the Sadducees, *which* say that there is no such resurrection" (Matthew 22 : 23); occurring in such use 151 times, while *that* is similarly used but 5 times.

In Tyndale's version of 1526, *which* refers in the Gospels to a noun about 418 times, *that* to a noun 119 times, a total of 537 times, or in the proportion of 78 per cent. to 22 per cent. *Which*

refers to a noun denoting a place or thing 153 times, to a personal noun 265 times. *Which* refers to a personal, indefinite or demonstrative pronoun 144 times. *That* refers to a non-personal noun 77 times, to a noun denoting a person 42 times, or a total of 119. *That* refers to a pronoun 384 times. Out of 602 cases of the use of a simple relative referring to a pronoun, *that* is used in 64 per cent. of all cases, *which* in 23.5 per cent. of all cases.

The limited use of *who* in the Gospels in Tyndale's version is shown by the fact that out of about 1165 cases of the use of the simple relative, *who* is used only 55 times or a little more than in 5 per cent. of the cases.

The two translations of the Bible by Tyndale, 1526, and the King James version of 1611 present often kindred features in the use of words. The translators of the King James version adopted substantially the usage of the version of Tyndale. Nothing shows the dependence of the translators of the King James version upon Tyndale more than a comparison of the use and relative frequency of certain forms. We note a striking change which the language had undergone since the period of Wiclif. The relative pronoun *which* refers in the greatest number of cases to nouns, the relative pronoun *that*, in addition to its use with nouns, is used almost universally with personal and indefinite pronouns. The form of two petitions in the Lord's Prayer illustrate this usage, and have remained fixed in liturgical service to the present time: "Our Father *which* art in Heaven," "forgive us our sins, for we also forgive everyone *that* is indebted to us." The relative pronouns *which* and *that* occur in the four Gospels in the Tyndale version 1065 times. Of these, *that* is used 503 times, and *which* 562 times.

The use of the relatives *which* and *that* in the King James version does not differ greatly from the use of these pronouns in the version of Tyndale. In Tyndale, the relative pronoun *that* is used 32 times, where *which* is substituted in the King James version; *which* takes the place of *that* 4 times, and *which* is used 6 times instead of *who*, of the King James version, while in 60 cases an equivalent expression is used instead of a relative pronoun.

In Shakespeare, if we take the *Merchant of Venice* as representing fairly the plays, *that* is used 75 times, or in 83 per cent. of the restrictive clauses, while *which* is used in the same class of clauses 20 times, or in about 17 per cent.; *that* is used in co-ordinate clauses 11 times, or in 32 per cent., and *which* is used 23 times,

or in 68 per cent. of such cases. The usage which we have found in the King James version, and earlier in the Tyndale version, occurs also in Shakespeare. In the above play, *that* refers to personal nouns 15 times, or in about 88 per cent. of the cases, while *which* refers to personal pronouns but twice, or 12 per cent. *Who* refers to personal pronouns 26 times, to nouns 8 times, to animals personified once. In the entire play, *that* occurs 122 times, equal to 62.5 per cent., *which* 73 times, or 37.5 per cent. *Which* is used in restrictive clauses 20 times, in co-ordinate clauses 23 times.

The usage of Shakespeare is thus very flexible, showing greater variety and greater freedom, as we should expect, than occurs in the version of the Scriptures.

The relative pronoun was omitted in restrictive, but not in subordinate clauses. *Who* originally referred to things as well as to pronouns, and such use is familiar in Shakespeare. Thus, in the *Merchant of Venice*, the Prince of Morocco, in describing the three caskets, says: "The first of gold *who* (which) this inscription bears, *who* chooseth me shall gain what many men desire." "The second silver, *which* this promise carries, *who* chooses me shall get as much as he deserves."

A little later, *that* occurs, often with great uniformity, apparently to lend smoothness to the verse. "In the prologue of Fletcher's *Faithful Shepherdess* (1610), which was probably not written by Fletcher, *which* occurs, but *that* appears uniformly in the remaining acts of the play" (Morris).

A century later (1726), we find Swift using the relative *that* when the antecedent is a pronoun, thus following the usage in Tyndale and in the King James version of the Bible.

In the eighteenth century, there was a manifest effort on the part of certain writers to promote the use of *who* and *which* at the expense of *that*. We have in No. 78 of the *Spectator*, Steele's humorous plea in behalf of the restoration of *who* and *which* to their ancient rights: "We are descended of ancient families, and kept up our dignity and honor many years, till the jack-sprat *that* supplanted us. How often have we found ourselves slighted by the clergy in their pulpits and the lawyers at the bar. Nay, how often have we heard in one of the most polite and august assemblies in the universe, to our great mortification, these words, 'That that that noble lord urged'; which, if one of us had had justice done,

would have sounded nobler thus, 'That which that noble lord urged.' Senates themselves, the guardians of British liberty, have degraded us and preferred *that* to us; and yet no decree was ever given against us. In the very acts of Parliament, in which the utmost right should be done to everybody, word and thing, we find ourselves often either not used, or used one instead of another. In the first and best prayer children are taught they learn to misuse us. 'Our Father *which* art in Heaven' should be 'Our Father *who* art in Heaven'; and even a convocation, after long debates, refused to consent to an alteration of it. In our general confession we say, 'Spare thou them, O God, *which* confess their faults,' which ought to be '*who* confess their faults.' What hopes then have we of having justice done us, when the makers of our very prayers and laws, and the most learned in all faculties, seem to be in a confederacy against us, and our enemies themselves must be our Judges?"

Steele's view is specious, and is not based upon an accurate knowledge of the historical use of the relatives, or he may have had in mind a contemporary fashion in literature which he sought to counteract. If so, it is not clear against whom his shafts were directed.

In the Sir Roger de Coverley papers in the *Spectator*, written by Addison and Steele, the relatives *which* and *that* occur 531 times; of these, *which* is used 353 times, *that* 178 times. *Which* is used in restrictive clauses 179 times, or in 53 per cent. of all cases, *that* 161 times, or in 47 per cent. of all cases. *Which* refers to nouns 255 times, *that* to nouns 129 times. The influence of an antecedent modified by demonstrative or an indefinite pronoun, to which in certain instances the choice of the relative may be due, is shown by the fact that *which* refers to a noun so modified 83 times, equal to 76 per cent. of such cases; *that* refers similarly to a noun so modified in 26 cases, equal to 24 per cent. of such cases. *That* refers to a demonstrative or an indefinite pronoun 39 times, equal to 76½ per cent. of such cases, *which*, 12 times, equal to 23½ per cent. We see here a revival or perpetuation of the usage of the earlier centuries. In spite of the great influence ascribed, apparently erroneously, to Addison in re-establishing the use of *that*, he uses this relative only one-third as often as *which*.

In Macaulay's essay on Milton, the relative *which* occurs 191 times, *that* 7 times, total 198 times. *Which* refers to noun ante-

cedents 174 times, or in 99 per cent. of all cases; *that* refers to a noun antecedent but once. There is a striking use of *who* as a relative. This pronoun occurs in all 101 times; referring in 58 instances to a noun, and in 43 to a pronoun; to a personal pronoun 6 times, to a demonstrative or indefinite pronoun 37 times. This is the highest proportion obtained in the examination of any author. It shows a distinct mannerism, affecting noticeably the style of the historian. *That* as a relative occurs only 7 times. *Which* is used in restrictive clauses 198 times, or in 97 per cent. of all cases; *that* occurs in the same class of clauses 6 times, or in 3 per cent. of all cases. *Which* refers to an indefinite or demonstrative pronoun 10 times, or 71 per cent.; *that* 4 times, or 29 per cent. *What* is used 17 times. *Which* is used to introduce co-ordinate clauses 6 times, *that* in no instance. *Which* refers to an indefinite or demonstrative pronoun 13 times, or 81 per cent., *that* 3 times.

In the *Sartor Resartus* (1831) of Thomas Carlyle, the relatives *which* and *that* occur in all 393 times. *Which* is used in restrictive clauses 259 times, or in 66 per cent. of all cases, *that* 134 times, or in 34 per cent. of all cases. The relative in co-ordinate sentences is *which*, occurring 34 times, and is universally employed. *Which* is the relative employed with nouns, as in the King James version of the Bible, in about 243 instances, or in 90 per cent. of all cases. *What* is used as a relative 93 times, *that which* 4 times.

In Emerson's *Essays*, second series (1844), the relatives *which* and *that* occur 402 times; of these, *which* is used in restrictive clauses 344 times, or in about 86 per cent.; *that* is used in restrictive clauses 58 times, or in 14 per cent. of all cases. *Which* is used in co-ordinate sentences 27 times, or in all cases, *that* not at all. *What* is used 55 times, *that which* 21 times. *Which* nearly always relates to nouns, namely, in 330 out of 344 instances of its use.

Matthew Arnold, in his *Essays on Criticism* (1865), shows a uniform preference for *which* in both restrictive and co-ordinate clauses, greater variety and a more flexible adoption of one or the other relative. In four essays, namely, those on "Heinrich Heine," "A Guide to English Literature," "A French Critic on Goethe" and "George Sand," in 201 cases of the uses of the relatives *which* and *that*, these pronouns are used in restrictive clauses 188 times. *Which* is used in 186 instances, or in about

99 per cent. of all cases, *that* 2, or in 1 per cent.; *which* is used in co-ordinate clauses 12 times, *that* once. *What* is used as a relative 68 times in the same essays, *that which* 4 times. The use of *what* as a relative shows a steady and remarkable growth in frequency in later writers. Its use by Matthew Arnold in the above selections occurs 68 times, or in 25 per cent. of all cases of the use of a relative pronoun. *Which* is the common relative in co-ordinate clauses, being used in about 92 per cent. of all the cases.

The striking frequency of *which* in modern literature is shown in the writings of Mrs. Humphry Ward. The conclusions reached in our examination of the works of Macaulay and De Quincy are maintained, though not in as extreme a degree. Thus in *Robert Elsmere* (1888), Book 1, in about one-fourth of the volume, the relatives *that* and *which* occur 400 times; of these, *which* occurs 350 times, or about 87½ per cent., *that* 50 times, or 12½ per cent. Of relatives referring to noun antecedents *which* is used 341 times, to pronoun antecedents 9 times; *that* is used referring to a noun antecedent 41 times or 82 per cent., to a pronoun antecedent 9 times or 18 per cent. Mrs. Ward's use of these relatives is apparently confined to restrictive clauses.

Proverbs which have existed in the popular language for many centuries have preserved an archaic type of expression and are permanent representatives of primitive usage. Similarly children's rhymes, such as "The house *that* Jack built," which goes back to a mediæval Hebrew version in a hymn. In "This is the house that Jack built," "This is the malt *that* lay in the house *that* Jack built," we have the early use of the relative *that* in restrictive clauses; so also, in such proverbs as "Handsome is *that* handsome does," quoted from Goldsmith in the *Vicar of Wakefield*, chapter first; "He *that* will not when he may, when he will he shall have nay"; "There is none so blind as they *that* won't see"; "'Tis an ill dog *that* is not worth whistling for."

We thus see that the dominant relative *þe* of early English times was displaced by *that* in the thirteenth century, that *what* also appeared at that time in isolated cases in its relative use, while *who* and *whose* occur but seldom and then usually in direct and indirect questions. At the close of the fourteenth century, *that* was used in Wiclif's translations of the Gospels in 76 per cent. of all cases of the use of the relative, *which* in 16 per cent. of such cases.

One hundred and fifty years later, in 1526, *that* occurs as a rela-

tive in the Tyndale version in only 44 per cent. of all cases, while *which* has risen from 16 per cent. in Wiclif to 50 per cent. in Tyndale. *Which* was confined largely to nouns and *that* to pronouns. In the eighteenth century, *which* declines in use in the classical English of Addison and Steele, while *that* gains slightly in frequency. A more marked change is manifest in the nineteenth century in the English of Macaulay, where *which* refers to a noun in 99 per cent. of all cases of its use as a relative, constituting a marked feature of his style. In Matthew Arnold, this proportion is preserved; also, though in a less degree, in the writings of Mrs. Humphry Ward. The present tendency is to subordinate the use of *that*, perhaps in part due to its use as a declarative conjunction, while *who* has gained in frequency of use and refers mainly to personal nouns.

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OPISTHENOGENESIS, OR THE DEVELOPMENT OF SEGMENTS, MEDIAN TUBERCLES AND MARKINGS *A TERGO*.

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Weismann, in his suggestive *Studies in the Theory of Descent* (1876), was the first to discuss the origin of the markings of caterpillars, and to show that in *Deilephila hippophaës* the ring-like spots of the larva "first originated on the segment bearing the caudal horn, and were then gradually transferred as secondary spots to the preceding segments" (Vol. 1, p. 277).

Afterwards (1881-1890), Eimer¹ showed that in the European wall-lizard "a series of markings pass in succession over the body from behind forwards, just as one wave follows another, and the anterior ones vanish while new ones appear behind." He speaks

¹ "Untersuchungen ueber das Variiren der Mauereidechse," *Archiv f. Naturg.*, 1881; "Ueber die Zeichnung der Thiere," *Zool. Anzeiger*, 1882, 1883, 1884; *Organic Evolution*, London, 1890.